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RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 0862  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 0549  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1565  
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC PRIORITY  
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SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE RELATIVELY  
OPTIMISTIC, SEEKS TO DEFINE ITS ROLE

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Soros Foundation's Open Society Institute's (OSI) Executive Director in Kazakhstan judges that the government of Kazakhstan's political will to provide access to government-related information is "spotty but encouraging." She laments lack of attention to vulnerable groups, including terminally ill patients and sexual minorities. She questions the government's political will to increase freedom of expression. She said OSI intends to focus its programmatic attention this year on young business leaders. Freely admitting OSI in the recent past has had somewhat of an adversarial relationship with other donors concerned with democracy and human rights, she said she intends to seek greater communication and cooperation with the donor community. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (SBU) The Ambassador met with the Soros Foundation's Open Society Institute (OSI) Executive Director Anna Alexandrova (a Canadian citizen of ethnic-Russian origin) in Almaty on April 10. He asked for her candid evaluation of Kazakhstan's status on democracy and human rights. She responded that she is divided on this question, but relatively optimistic. On the one hand, she sees real momentum forward, backed by apparently sincere political will from the top, on a number of important issues, including increased transparency, at the same time that the government's commitment to freedom of expression and attention to most-vulnerable groups is lagging.

ELECTRONIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION SPOTTY BUT GETTING BETTER

¶4. (SBU) Alexandrova praised the Government of Kazakhstan's apparently sincere commitment to complete the validation for the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). She said she was especially encouraged that a number of senior Kazakhstani officials are fully committed, and even enthusiastic, about meeting this international goal. Further on transparency, she said OSI has completed a survey of Government of Kazakhstan web sites and has found "significant

political will" to provide citizens access to government information. She said the Accounting Committee's web site is "superb" with its detailed information about the national budget and spending priorities, the web site [www.zakon.kz](http://www.zakon.kz) that posts legislative information is "spotty but generally encouraging, and the Ministry of Interior's web site is "surprisingly not bad." She judged the worst web site for providing the public access to policy and information is the Ministry of Education's.

#### MOST VULNERABLE GROUPS: TERMINALLY ILL AND SEXUAL MINORITIES

15. (SBU) Alexandrova said she personally would like to focus OSI's attention on the "most vulnerable groups." She cited two as of greatest concern -- terminally ill patients and sexual minorities. She lamented that the Government of Kazakhstan's health-care system does not guarantee terminally ill patients access to pain-killing opiates. She said it is an uphill battle to get anyone to pay attention to this need because it's "such a foreign concept to the medical establishment in Kazakhstan."

16. (SBU) She also expressed concern about the Gay-Lesbian-Bisexual-Transgender (GLBT) community, which she mentioned was her professional focus before she came to Kazakhstan. Alexandrova said OSI is in touch quietly with a lesbian NGO, Amulet, led by an out-spoken ethnic-Russian activist, and a gay NGO, Adilet (Justice), whose leadership is more quiet. She said even though these small groups desire to be more activist, they have little support from their natural constituencies, because gay men and lesbians tend to meet and socialize privately "below the radar" in

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Kazakhstan. Alexandrova alleged that a number of high-profile government and business figures are gay and lesbian, and that their lovers are well known "within certain circles," but cultural standards prevent these big names from "coming out." She noted that Almaty is well-known in Central Asia as a sort of sexual-minority haven, with its several gay and lesbian bars and nightclubs, which are, nevertheless, subject to occasional police harassment, including shake-downs of clients. She said the GLBT issue is not an identified priority for OSI in Kazakhstan, although it's a general OSI priority. Even so, she said she is personally encouraging the handful of gay and lesbian activists to use litigation to move their issues toward public recognition.

#### ETHNIC FRICTION

17. (SBU) Alexandrova said she is worried that ethnic conflict is growing. When pressed to explain -- since this judgment is generally contrary to common perception in Kazakhstan -- she said that some ethnic Russians and other "European" non-Kazakhs have complained to her privately that they feel disadvantaged in independent Kazakhstan and would prefer to return to the standards of the Soviet era. In further discussion, she admitted this might simply be normal post-colonial experience.

#### WHERE TO FOCUS?

18. (SBU) Alexandrova said she would like OSI to focus attention on freedom of expression, where (she said) "political will is lacking." Specifically, she cited occasional attacks on journalists, and "unproven but apparently official" harassment of opposition and independent media web sites, especially against [www.zona.kz](http://www.zona.kz) and [www.respublika.kz](http://www.respublika.kz). When the Ambassador acknowledged these problems but pointed out the surprising amount of political debate and criticism of the government in the print media, Alexandrova said she agreed; but she noted that the international community tends not to monitor the day-to-day press in detail and, thus, "doesn't get this nuance" because foreign analysts focus mainly on high-profile problems.

## OSI PRIORITIES?

19. (SBU) Alexandrova did not shy away from admitting OSI needs to regain its footing in Kazakhstan. She freely stated that her predecessor had employed "a bit of a divide-and-conquer strategy," going it alone rather than working with other donors committed to promoting democracy and human rights. She said she sincerely hopes to repair the damage this caused and re-establish communication and cooperation. When asked where OSI intends to concentrate its energies, Alexandrova lamented that OSI tends to work from "a menu of global programs," rather than craft country-specific agendas. She said the best compromise solution she has found so far is for OSI to "choose from the menu" the theme of "youth engagement," which means she will focus for this current year on young business leaders. She praised the "Bolashak Generation" as the great hope for the future of Kazakhstan.

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